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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC #8965-82

5 November 1982

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM : [REDACTED]
National Intelligence Officer for Warning

SUBJECT : DOD/NATO Planning for Response to Ambiguous
Warning

1. In your discussions with American, West European, and NATO officials, the subject of NATO response to ambiguous warning is likely to be raised in two dimensions that may have significant implications for your roles as DCI and the President's principal intelligence adviser. First, these officials may invite your views regarding the concept of routine NATO responses to indications of changes in Warsaw Pact force posture and readiness. Second, they may wish to sound out your attitude toward playing an active role in supporting NATO's I&W system, primarily by providing increased intelligence support to this system.

2. These issues raise two central questions: (a) what is an acceptable trade-off between increased risks to sensitive sources and methods of routine disclosure of US intelligence to NATO and the potential advantages to the US in terms of gaining greater understanding and support for US policy views? (b) is it desirable from the standpoint of US global interests and responsibilities to accept greater restraints on US freedom of action implicit in a NATO process that might confine US responses to those measures that command the unanimous consent of NATO members?

Background

3. The impetus to NATO planning for routine responses to ambiguous warning originated in recommendations by the Secretary of Defense. In his Annual Report to the Congress last February, Secretary Weinberger said:

Our forces and those of our allies must be prepared to respond to warning indicators that are highly ambiguous.

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These responses must be such that they can be decided upon quickly, sustained--if necessary, for a prolonged period--until the ambiguity is resolved, and repeated every time the warning indicators demand it.... A policy that provides for such responses, as a routine procedure, can help to avoid crises and strengthen deterrence.

Last spring, Secretary Weinberger requested the NATO allies to join the US in a study of responses to ambiguous warning. Secretary General Luns has initiated a NATO study of this matter, and the first report will be presented at the December meeting of Defense Ministers.

4. DOD planners last August produced a Defense Guidance Study entitled "Crisis Reaction and Strategic Warning Indicators." This study noted that the "DOD relies primarily on military indicators for the production of strategic warning." It pointed out that, "Because of the nature of military indications, DOD warning emphasis is on an enemy's capability to initiate hostile actions. DOD has less capability to determine an enemy's intent to initiate hostile actions." The DOD relies on its Worldwide Warning Indicator Monitoring System (WWIMS), and the study judged that this system has given the DOD a "good ability to provide strategic warning at some point during the pre-hostilities period, for the scenarios considered." (Warsaw Pact attack on NATO and a North Korean attack on the ROK)

Concept of Routine Responses to Ambiguous Warning

5. The DOD concept rests heavily on a study by Pan Heuristics prepared by Albert Wohlstetter, General William A. Knowlton (Ret.), and Richard Brody in December 1981. Its premise is summarized in this proposition: "Effective response to ambiguous warning requires responses which are routinely repeatable based on low confidence intelligence.... By making responses routine, we will reduce their political profile and the danger that our preparatory actions will seem likely to worsen the crisis in themselves. Otherwise, desires for 'crisis management,' for keeping things calm, will argue against taking necessary measures against the threat." The Defense Guidance Study echoes this proposition: "Responses to ambiguous warnings should be relatively low cost, sustainable, and repeatable.... The US has rarely reacted to warnings on a routine basis. There is merit in doing so because a preparatory action which is taken frequently is less provocative. For instance, if we always called up ten percent of the Reserve force when tensions were building, then little would be made of such action." The DOD study recommends developing a system "that associates warning assessment with a list of potential pre-planned candidates for operational responses."

Problems with the Concept

6. Although the concept of routine responses to ambiguous

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warning based solely or primarily on military indications may seem sound in the abstract, the only meaningful test is to examine how useful and meaningful the concept would have been to decision-makers in "real world" historical cases. The Pan Heuristics study complains that in the cases of the Cuban missile crisis, the October 1973 war, Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Poland in December 1980, "avoiding alarm to domestic citizenry or the Soviets has been the watchword." But this overlooks the fundamental reality that military developments seldom if ever speak for themselves but must be interpreted in the context of a potential aggressor's intentions, perceptions, incentives, and cost-benefit calculations. Senior decision-makers usually require more than a warning that a potential adversary has increased his capabilities to initiate hostile actions and that this in itself has increased the likelihood of war. Field commanders may be satisfied that military indications require a response, but national leaders and their intelligence advisers must interpret complex and disparate military developments with a conceptual framework based on assumptions regarding the adversary's intentions and calculations. As Richard Betts has pointed out in his new book, Surprise Attack, "The concern (of decision-makers) is how much evidence warrants military reactions that will pose financial, diplomatic and domestic political costs. As long as the issue is how much, it is seductively easy for decision-makers to wait for more." Betts also observes that "Warning is a continuum in several dimensions: the amount of weight of threatening intelligence indicators detected; the ratio between these and contradictory non-threatening indicators; and the timing of receipt, evaluation, dissemination and reactions to indicators"

7. The second major problem with the concept is the formidable difficulty of securing a NATO consensus on the significance and meaning of ambiguous military indications. Experience demonstrates how difficult and time-consuming it is to obtain a "coordinated" assessment within the US Intelligence Community. These problems would be compounded in the alliance structure. It required many months to secure even the agreement of military authorities to NATO's MC 166/4 I&W List, and no attempt has been made to obtain "political" agreement. The problem of molding parochial and divergent national outlooks into a NATO consensus on military responses should not be underestimated. As an assistant secretary general of NATO has remarked, "In NATO, the perceptions are the realities." It is not enough to urge, in the words of the DOD study, that decisions to respond should be made "when the warning indicators tell us that action is required."

Recommendations

8. In view of the DOD and DIA's primary responsibilities for supporting NATO, SHAPE, and EUCOM intelligence systems and of the limited value to national decision-makers of a procedure based primarily on military indications, it is recommended that you express interest and general support for NATO planning for

response to ambiguous warning, but hedge commitments to direct participation or significant increases in intelligence support to the military levels of NATO. Your responsibilities to the NATO warning capability can best be served by increasing the flow of warning intelligence, to include tutorials, to the political levels of NATO. This could be done through the DDO liaison channels with NATO member countries. Over time, we will discern ways to integrate the DCI and DOD support to NATO warning.



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